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**The effects of AD voluntary substitution programmes in the  
livelihoods of coca-growing communities in Colombia: An  
analysis based on Participatory approaches to Development.**

A research project presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of International Development (School of People,  
Environment and Planning)

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**2021**

## **Abstract**

At present, Colombia is the largest coca-producing country in the world. About seventy percent of the total area under coca cultivation worldwide is in this country. The Colombian government has responded to this challenge in two different ways. On the one hand, it has implemented forced eradication activities, such as aerial spraying, to destroy coca crops. This strategy has been largely criticized by scholars and local people for its short-term results and its negative impacts on coca-producing communities and the environment. On the other hand, the government has executed alternative development (AD) programmes aimed at addressing economic and social obstacles in these communities while providing them with productive alternatives to coca crops. This research aimed to analyse the effectiveness of AD programmes considering a key aspect in their implementation, which is the participation of the communities involved. To achieve this, this research project explored the effectiveness of the current AD programme, the National Comprehensive Plan for the Substitution of illicit crops (PNIS) through the lens of participatory approaches to development. The research found that the participation of the communities in the PNIS and other previous AD programmes in Colombia has been limited. In some scenarios, participation has been used as a buzzword on working papers rather than a real means to empower communities and build sustainable alternatives.

Despite its PNIS stated purpose of addressing the limitations of past AD programmes; in practice, it has not shown clear differences with those past experiences. The government's short-term approach of reducing coca crops in the shortest possible time has been imposed to the detriment of a long-term objective that seeks to transform the regions and guarantee the well-being of the communities affected by the crops.

**Key words:** Alternative Development, Participation, Colombia, Communities, Coca.

## **Acknowledgments**

Two years ago, I had the privilege of being awarded a New Zealand scholarship. Thanks to this opportunity, I was able to be part of the Massey University International Development programme. Here, I was able to learn from exceptional professors and lecturers, who gave me their unconditional support and knowledge during my academic training process.

In this section, I would like to acknowledge the support of all the people who accompanied me throughout this learning process, as well as during the development of this research project.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Ph.D. Sharon McLennan, for her great support and motivation, especially during the most difficult times. I could not have achieved my goals without her help and invaluable feedback.

I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends at Massey, Kimberly, Ramiro, Macky, Alejandra, Louis, Miranda, and Sungkey, who encouraged me throughout my journey. Special thanks to my good friend Marc for also reviewing and editing this work.

This project could not have reached this stage without the collaboration of the experts interviewed who very kindly accepted my invitation to participate in this research. I am deeply grateful for all their insights.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, my brother, and my grandmother Mina for their love and support.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Colombia has been an important player in the international illicit drug market in recent decades. About 70% of the total area currently under coca cultivation worldwide is in Colombia. The Colombian government has taken a range of measures to confront drug trafficking and its impact on the economic and social development of the country with differing levels of success (Rincón-Ruiz, Correa, León & Williams, 2016). Many of these measures have been implemented in an uncoordinated manner and have favoured forced eradication strategies over more development-oriented alternatives, as much of the analysis of counternarcotic policies merely uses the number of hectares under illicit cultivation as an indicator of success. This is despite calls by activists, locals and the academic community to analyse the drug problem from a development perspective. This research project addresses this gap by exploring the effectiveness of the current National Comprehensive Plan for the Substitution of illicit crops in Colombia through the lens of participatory approaches to development in order to explore the quality of the community participation in this programme as well as the role of community participation in the overall effectiveness of these interventions in improving communities' livelihoods.

One of the sections of the 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP guerrillas was the design of the Comprehensive National Plan for the Substitution of Crops for Illicit Use (PNIS). Through this plan, the aim was to offer a definitive solution to the thousands of Colombian families who depend on crops for illicit use. These communities are among the most vulnerable in the country. Contrary to what may be thought about the profitability of this illicit economy, families living in areas with coca crops face great vulnerability and their quality of life is very low compared to most of the rural and urban population (Ideas para la Paz, 2018). Most of these families are made up of young people (forty-one per cent of the total population is under 19 years of age) and half of the population are women. These people have been excluded from the uneven economic development of the country and are victims of historical neglect by the state.



Considering the importance of providing coca-growing families with a long-term solution, this work aims to contribute to existing knowledge of AD programmes in Colombia by exploring their effectiveness on improving the livelihoods of coca-growing communities based on participatory approaches to development. To fulfil this aim, this study seeks to answer the next research question: How effective have the Colombian government's AD voluntary substitution programmes been in improving the livelihoods of coca-growing communities? To guarantee a structured and comprehensive answer, a set of four research objectives were proposed, namely:

- To explore the impacts of AD voluntary substitution programmes implemented by the Colombian government on the livelihoods of coca-growing communities.
- To identify what participation has happened in the AD voluntary substitution programmes in Colombia.
- To investigate the role of participation in the effectiveness of AD voluntary substitution programmes in Colombia.
- To consider why the AD approaches have or have not been effective in improving people's livelihoods in Colombia.

This chapter has given an overview of the research and research report. In the second chapter I give historical overview of the main strategies that the Colombian government has implemented to address the problem of crops for illicit use in the country as well as some political and historical background of the country. This section will analyse the obstacles and achievements of the AD programmes implemented prior to the start of the PNIS. In the third chapter, the theoretical framework of the investigation will be outlined. An account will be given of the different participatory approaches to development, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. In the fourth chapter the methodology of this research will be explained. In order to carry out this research project, interviews with experts were conducted, as well as an extensive document analysis. The fifth chapter includes an analysis of the data found, regarding PNIS, through the lens of participatory approaches to development. Finally, in the sixth chapter the final findings and conclusions will be presented.

## **Chapter 2: Coca Cultivation and Anti-Narcotic Strategies in Colombia**

This chapter aims to provide background information about anti-narcotic strategies in Colombia and explain the context in which coca production has become a major issue in the country. First, I will explain the historical and political context of Colombia during recent decades. This will allow the reader to have a clear understanding of the surge of some of the main issues discussed in this research. This brief explanation includes essential topics to better understand Colombia at its most rural as well as the internal armed conflict present in the country. This, in turn, will clarify why coca production has found a perfect setting to grow here. Then, I will provide a historical overview of the two strategies that the government has used to tackle coca production and drug trade, namely, forced eradication strategies and alternative development (AD) programmes. Even though this research project has focused on analysing the participatory aspect of AD programmes, it is fundamental to know why forced eradication strategies do not provide sustainable development outcomes since both policies compete for funding and other resources. Finally, the chapter explains the impacts, obstacles, and limitations that AD programmes and participation have had during past experiences in the country.

### **2.1 Background on Colombia**

Colombia (Republic of Colombia) is a country located in South America. It is bounded on the east by Venezuela, at the southeast by Brazil, at the west by the Pacific Ocean, at the North by the Caribbean Sea, at the northwest by Panamá, and at the South by Ecuador and Perú. The country is divided into 32 territorial departments and its capital district is Bogotá. According to the latest projections, there are more than 50 (fifty) million Colombians (DANE, 2020). Most of them living in the urban areas of the country (81%) (The World Bank, 2019).

### ***2.1.1 Conflict in Colombia: Historical Background.***

Colombia has suffered from an internal armed conflict more than half a century old. For the past seventy years, the country has not fully experienced political stability due to the complexity and continuous evolution of its internal conflict. The origins of this conflict can be traced to the unequal distribution of land and the lack of spaces for participation after the independence from Spain in 1810 (CIDOB, 2017). According to Galindo, Restrepo & Sanchez (as cited in Bassols, 2016), current Colombian society still reflects several of the segregationist elements typical of colonial times when an upper social class imposed its world views on the lower classes mainly formed by Amerindians and African slaves. They also state that this imposition occurred through oppression and low social mobility. These segregationist elements were later inherited by the newly independent nation (Hoberman & Socolow, 1986).

In the 19th century, the first two political parties were formed in Colombia, the conservative and liberal parties. With opposing views on the country, both political parties fought civil wars during part of the 19th century and lasted until half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bailey, 1967). During this period, the conflict worsened due to the country's poor economic situation and the subsequent assassination of the liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. After this last event, the country experienced one of the most violent periods in its history, named 'El Bogotazo' (Davis, 1994). This period ended when both parties agreed to alternate the government of the country every four years (for sixteen years). However, the agreement did not include any other political movements. This lack of spaces for free political participation and socioeconomic exclusion, especially of minority groups and peasants, encouraged the origin of leftist guerrilla groups in the country, including the recently demobilized FARC-EP, the M-19 (demobilized) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) (CIDOB, 2017).

### **2.1.1.1 Actors of the conflict.**

**Leftist guerrilla groups:** The origins of these guerrilla groups were due to differentiated regional and historical situations (CIDOB, 2017). However, they all justified violence as the only way to transform society. The FARC-EP, the largest guerrilla group in the country, was demobilized in 2016 after signing a peace agreement with the Colombian government. The formulation and implementation of the PNIS was part of that agreement. Currently, the ELN is the only active guerrilla group in the country and operate mainly in rural areas. Among its main criminal activities are extortion, drug trafficking and attacks on national infrastructure (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013).

**Right wing paramilitaries:** These are extreme right-wing illegal armed groups. Most emerged in the 1980s as illegal armed groups financed by wealthy landowners, small industrialists, and traffickers with the aim of confronting the actions of the guerrillas and communism (CIDOB, 2017). Most of the paramilitary groups demobilized in 2006, and the remainder are now known as criminal gangs.

**Security Forces:** These are the official security forces in Colombia (soldiers, police, air force, etc). According NGO Human Rights Watch (2015), there have been cases of human rights violations perpetuated by Colombian official security forces in recent years.

**Organized Crime:** After the dismantling of drug cartels in Colombia in the 1990s, the main criminal structures of drug trafficking moved to Central America and Mexico (CIDOB, 2017). In Colombia, the guerrillas and criminal gangs now coordinate the business in the country.

**Drug trafficking:** During the 1980s, the country experienced deep economic transformations, going from being a coffee-growing country to a mining and coca-growing country (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013). These dynamics created incentives to the main actors of the conflict. Drug trafficking shaped the conflict in the

country as it has allowed guerrillas, paramilitary groups and criminal gangs to finance their illicit activities and then get power in the areas where they frequent.

Victims: The civilian population has been victim of the armed conflict in many ways and by all the different actors mentioned above. People in rural areas, especially minority groups and peasants, have disproportionately paid the price for the internal war (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013).

U.S.A: The United States has played an essential role in the country's armed conflict. Colombia is the main ally of this country in the region, and a large part of this relationship is based on cooperation to confront drug trafficking and illegal armed groups (especially after the September 11 attacks) (Buxton, 2015). Through USAID, the United States has provided Colombia with resources to develop alternative development programmes in communities affected by conflict and drug trafficking (Vargas, 2011). However, Álvarez (2005) argues that despite funding designated to these programmes, they have not been concerned with improving people's quality of life. She notes that, instead, these interventions have focused, initially, on controlling the spread of communism and, currently, on controlling illicit crops. At present, the most important indicator for the U.S. is the reduction of illicit crops, regardless of the strategy used. This was recently evidenced by the threat, by the administration of the Trump government, to decertify Colombia in its fight against drugs after reporting a historic increase on coca production in 2017 (The New York Times, 2019). Pressure from the United States often favours the use of forced eradication strategies such as aerial spraying by the Colombian government (Peceny & Durnan, 2006; Dávalos & Dávalos, 2020).

Colombian government: The Government of Colombia is a republic with a separation of powers into executive, judicial and legislative branches. Understanding the changes in this government in recent decades is important for the research. Álvaro Uribe Vélez was president of Colombia during the periods 2002-2006 and 2006-2010. His government was characterized by the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking. In the presidential periods 2010-2014 and 2014-2018, Juan Manuel Santos, former defence minister during

the Uribe government and sole recipient of the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize, governed the country with a programme focused on peace talks with the FARC guerrillas. In 2016, the peace agreement was signed, but this later had modifications since a plebiscite did not pass where most voters said no to the agreement. The biggest opponent of the agreement, and promoter of the vote for No, was former President Uribe, who suggested that 'Santos was seeking peace at any cost'. In 2018, supported by his mentor (former President Uribe), Iván Duque Márquez wins the country's presidency. Duque's campaign was based on strong opposition to the peace accords with the FARC guerrillas.

## **2.2 Historical background on coca-crop production in Colombia.**

The production of the coca plant for drug trafficking purposes commenced in Colombia at the end of the 1970s (Thuomi, 2002). During this period, several international and local dynamics generated an environment conducive to the emergence of drug trafficking in some rural areas of the country. Among the international aspects that facilitated this boom were the strong demand from Europe and the United States, the large dividends of the drug trade, as well as the illegal commercial routes already established for smuggling (Giraldo & Lozada, 2008). Locally, the areas that were initially impacted by coca production in Colombia were characterized by the high levels of poverty among their inhabitants who, for the most part, were farmers displaced from other areas of the country due to a lack of economic opportunities (Thuomi, 2002). In addition to this, the presence of the state in these isolated regions had been, until this point, very weak or nil (Robinson, 2013). This last aspect is also aggravated by the presence of illegal armed groups such as guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug gangs. These illegal armed groups, in seeking to benefit from the drug production and distribution chains, have competed against the government and/or each other for control of these strategic territories (Ramírez, 2017). This dynamic has created a vicious cycle of violence in the rural areas of the country, and that, in turn, has generated serious impacts on the social, political and economic structures of the communities affected by coca crops (Pinzón-Tovar, 1994). These affected areas are mainly controlled by illegal armed groups who put their own interests above the common interest of the people.

The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a key period in the history of drug trafficking and production in Colombia. During this time, the production of the coca leaf sharply increased in the country (Cruz & Chaparro, 2017). The drug trafficking industry in the Colombian territory, until then, had essentially focused on the final phase of the drug production chain, even though there were areas in the country suitable to grow coca. Colombian drug cartels mainly managed the process of transforming coca leaf into cocaine. Much of the coca leaf, however, was not grown in Colombia but was imported from Bolivia and Peru (Dion & Russler, 2008). After the efforts made by the government of the United States to eradicate illicit crops in these countries, coca production found in Colombia a social, geographical and economic context suitable for its expansion (Thuomi, 2002). Thus, coca production in the country went from around 40 thousand hectares of coca in 1990 to roughly 164 thousand hectares of land under coca cultivation by the year 2000. Since then, and despite efforts by the Colombian government, the production of illicit crops has remained a significant obstacle for the development of the rural areas of the country. In 2018, according to the Colombian drug observatory, there were illicit crops in 22 of the 32 providences of the country. In 2018, the number of hectares under coca crops was 169 thousand, which accounted for a slight fall after breaking a historical high with a total of 171 hectares of illicit cultivation in 2017 (UNODC & Government of Colombia, 2019).

While some other Andean countries such as Bolivia and Peru have large indigenous populations, Colombia has significantly fewer. In the former countries, most of the coca leaf production destined for illicit use has been in the hands of these indigenous people, for whom coca leaf chewing has always been part of their cultural heritage and identity (Pfeiffer, 2013). In Colombia, indigenous communities represent only about 4.4% of the country's population (National Administrative Department of Statistics -DANE-, 2019), and only some of these groups have coca consumption as a tradition. Because of this, from the 1970s to the present, most of the coca production in Colombia has been in the hands of poor families of farmers. This is not to say that minority groups have not been affected by coca production. In fact, both indigenous and afro-Colombian communities have disproportionately suffered the consequences of drug trafficking in later years (Rincón-Ruíz & Kallis, 2013). This situation is attributed to the dynamics of this illegal economy as well as the government's punitive attempts to control the trade. The

eradication efforts of the national army, for example, have pushed illicit crops to increasingly poor and remote areas of the country and, in many cases, to natural reserves or areas with special indigenous or afro-Colombian jurisdiction (UNDOC & Government of Colombia, 2015). In some of these areas, eradication activities cannot be carried out in the same way as they are done in the rest of the country. Indigenous communities, for example, have the right to prior consultation before any fumigation actions are planned by the government. This situation is exploited by armed groups, to the detriment of the environment and indigenous and afro-Colombian communities. In 2018, around half of the area with illicit crops (47%) in Colombia were located in these territories with special jurisdiction (UNODC & Colombian Government, 2019). These armed groups also take advantage of the already vulnerable situation of these minority groups who, together with the farmers located in cultivation areas, have had to participate in this illegal industry through both coercion and necessary economic support. This is because of the lack of state presence to provide communities in these areas with peace, security and public services.

### **2.3 Social and political impacts of coca crops in rural communities.**

Even though this ‘short-term economy’<sup>1</sup> has allowed coca growers to meet some of their basic needs, the dynamics surrounding coca production has had important negative effects on different social and political institutions of the coca-growing communities. One of the social impacts that the drug trade has brought to these populations is the loss of traditional agricultural production. There are cases where indigenous communities have even had to face food shortages because of the new production patterns (Healy, 1985). Because of these impacts, Bagley (1985) also suggests that the survival of indigenous ‘cultural assets’ is at risk due to both the presence of drugs and the violence employed by drug lords. The violence generated by the presence of illegal armed groups has also affected the organizational capacity and active leadership of the communities, who face great security challenges when they try to make their voices heard (Velez & Lobo, 2019). This last impact shows us how the dynamics of coca production greatly restrict the freedom and

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<sup>1</sup> It refers to a production activity that only provides people with financial support to respond to their immediate needs.



political participation of the affected communities. Once illicit crops invade the territory of these communities it is difficult for villagers to get rid of them as armed groups provide protection to plantations through violence and intimidation (Huezo, 2017).

## **2.4 Forced Eradication Strategies in Colombia**

The Colombian Government has adopted different measures to confront this phenomenon, and its impact on the economic and social development of the country, with different levels of success. Among these efforts two contrasting anti-drug policies can be distinguished: those aimed at the forced eradication of illicit crops (e.g. aerial spraying) and those of voluntary substitution of illicit crops through alternative development programmes (Vargas, 2002). Much of the current literature on these policies pays particular attention to the negative effects of forced eradication activities, such as aerial spraying, on the environment, agriculture, governance and other social aspects of the affected communities (Navarrete-Frías & Thoumi, 2005; Rincón-Ruiz, Correa, León & Williams, 2016; Camacho & Mejía, 2017). This approach to dealing with the drug problem has been subjected to considerable criticism by the academic community over a number of years. Critics of this strategy question its ability to eliminate coca production permanently. Dion & Russler (2008), for example, point out that the eradication of coca crops through aerial spraying has only generated results in the short term. Indeed, coca production in Colombia has remained relatively stable over time, although with periods of boom and bust (Ideas para la Paz, 2019).

Despite the social, health and environmental consequences<sup>2</sup> highlighted by locals, activists and academic community, until 2015 Colombia was the only country in the world where aerial fumigation of illicit crops was allowed (Camacho & Mejía, 2017; Van Bruggen et al., 2018; Huezo, 2017). Destruction of coca crops through aerial spraying generates important social disruption among communities who solely depend on this economic activity to survive (Huertas, 2018). Coca-growing families face tremendous

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<sup>2</sup> Glyphosate, the chemical used to eradicate coca crops by the Colombian government, has shown to have negative effects on human health and environment. In 2015, The World Health Organization (WHO) reclassified this herbicide as “probably cancerogenic to humans”.

uncertainty when they get their only livelihoods destroyed without warning. The prohibition of this practice in 2015 was due to a ruling by the country's constitutional court based on scientific findings suggesting that glyphosate, the chemical used for spraying, increases the risk of cancer (Fritschi et al, 2015). However, following recent threats by the Trump administration to cut American aid to Colombia if drug production is not reduced (The New York Times, 2019), the current Colombian government has been pushing to resume aerial spraying actions. The government's proposal to resume this practice is currently under evaluation by the court.

The push to resume forced eradication programmes to control drug crops is consistent with the history of the US government in the region, which has strongly supported these approaches in producing countries as part of its 'war on drugs'. This strategy is based on a criminalization approach to drugs. The rationale behind this approach is that forced eradication efforts can reduce the supply of cocaine to such an extent that the consequent increase in the final price of the drug forces consumers to leave the market (Pacini & Franquemont, 1985). Likewise, through the tightening of judicial measures against producers and consumers, it seeks to create enough disincentives to discourage the participation of people in this industry (Buxton, 2015).

Yet, the literature on the effectiveness of anti-drug policies highlights several weaknesses of this criminalization approach. DiNardo (1993), for instance, fails to find any significant effect of induced-enforcement measures on the price of cocaine and, therefore, on the demand of end users. Some researchers claim that since the supply costs of producing cocaine are so low compared to the retail price of the drug, it is easy for drug dealers to absorb the costs posed by eradication activities and thus stabilize the final price (Moreno-Sanchez, Kraybill & Thompson, 2003). Similarly, the literature has identified a 'balloon effect' in the production of coca, which is attributed to the inelastic demand for this drug (Rincón-Ruiz & Kallis, 2013). Given the high profitability of this industry (due to the low supply costs), when production is reduced in one region as a result of forced eradication actions, the resulting unmet demand generates enough incentives to start growing coca plantations in other areas (See Raffo-Lopez, Castro & Díaz-España, 2016).

Despite criticism, this criminalization approach continues to be promoted by the United States both inside and outside its territory. This way of looking at the drug problem took hold after the attacks of September 11, when the US government began to consider the drug business as a threat to national security. The new argument behind these concerns is that drug trafficking provides large profits to criminal groups which, in turn, translates into the dangerous ability of these groups to control institutions and territories (Buxton, 2015). This reasoning was quickly adopted in Colombia due to its known internal conflict, which has been worsened due to the presence of drugs. Thus, since 2001, Colombia has seen a convergence of both the war on drugs and the war on counterinsurgents (Ramírez, 2017).

In Colombia, the drug criminalization approach has particularly affected small farmers who have taken up coca crops. Often living under already precarious living conditions, farmers are vulnerable to the economic stability that the efficiencies of the drug market offer. In the last decades, these communities have also had their vulnerabilities compounded by the fumigation of their crops without prior notice to threats of loss of their property titles by the Colombian Government (Huezo, 2017; Ramirez, 2017). Likewise, as will be discussed in the next section, farmers growing coca are expected to bear enormous risks to their livelihoods in order to participate in aid funded alternative development programmes that require the initial eradication of their illicit crops which, in many cases, are their only means of economic support. This denotes a clear misunderstanding of the causes by which small producers started drug crops in the first place. Under the criminalization approach, alternative development programmes, such as crop substitution, take a back seat against forced eradication actions that seek immediate results. Buxton (2015) conceives of this situation as a ‘great disconnect’ because instead of recognizing the cultivators as victims of the dynamics of drug trafficking, the policy makers see them as criminals or collaborators of organized crime and insurgent groups and therefore as an equal threat to national security.

## **2.5 Alternative Development (AD) in Colombia: Illicit crop substitution programmes.**

Before analysing how alternative development (AD) has been implemented in Colombia, it is worth clarifying how this concept is commonly used within the Colombian context. For those who are involved in international development, AD is normally understood as the process of empowering disenfranchised groups through the creation of opportunities that, considering local contexts, allow them to have greater control over their own lives and well-being (Friedmann, 1992; Chambers, 1997). Within the context of illicit crop reduction programmes, however, there are different approaches to the concept of AD. In Colombia, Sánchez (2005) identifies up to six different visions of the concept of AD. In general terms, we can identify 2 main approaches to the concept of alternative development in the country. On the one hand, there is the approach promoted mainly by the United Nations (UN) through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which defines alternative development as a process of sustainable and participatory rural development for regions with the presence of illicit crops and which is part of the anti-drug and national rural development policies. On the other hand, as pointed out by Sánchez, AD is part of a militarised security strategy against the drug trade and it is mainly promoted by the US government. Here, alternative development only makes sense to the extent that it allows the objectives of reducing illicit crops to be met. Under this approach, the metric used to measure the policy's success is merely the reduction of hectares with illicit crops (Buxton, 2015). This situation puts alternative development strategies at a disadvantage compared to forced eradication policies, since the latter offer results in the short term. Thus, in the face of these more 'efficient' methods, AD programmes are often understood only as strategies to alleviate the impacts that fumigation and forced eradication are having on rural communities (Vargas, 2011).

In Colombia, these different visions of alternative development have been adopted at different times during the last few decades. Pressure from the United States government has greatly influenced the way in which the drug problem is addressed in the country in last decades. Each government elected in Colombia has adopted its own alternative development approach and programmes in their own ways of responding to this pressure.

As a result, AD programmes in the country have not followed a continuous implementation process which has had consequences on their ability to deliver the promise of long-term results.

The research for this report focuses primarily on the current "Comprehensive National Programme for the Substitution of Illicit Crops" (PNIS<sup>3</sup>), which was created in the context of the Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and FARC guerrillas in 2016. References will also be made to previous AD crop substitution programmes. This is in order to make comparisons and provide an overview of the results of the crop substitution programmes in the country. These previous attempts are relevant, considering that the development of the AD policy in Colombia is not necessarily linear nor does it follow a predefined framework. On the contrary, the reasoning behind these policies usually changes depending on the national and international political context.

Although alternative development programmes in Colombia have not adopted fully differentiated strategies over time (as there are policy tools and arguments that come and go between them), there are historical events that have marked important paradigm shifts in drug policy. Among these important historical events are the launching of Plan Colombia in the year 2000 (which existed until 2015) and, more recently, the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016.

Plan Colombia was originally conceived in 1999 and aimed to eradicate crops of illicit use and strengthen state presence in rural areas of the country. This plan was supported by the United States government as part of its "war on drugs"<sup>4</sup>, and included diverse policies to reduce coca crops. However, among all those strategies, AD programmes as well as policies aimed to improve social and institutional aspects in coca-growing communities were frequently underdeveloped and underfunded as part of Plan Colombia (Dion & Russler, 2008). Lack of interest on the part of the government to invest in AD programmes and other development-oriented strategies is not something new. According to Sánchez

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<sup>3</sup> All acronyms in the Colombian context are using their Spanish initials

<sup>4</sup> The 'war on drugs' is an approach to the drug problem, led by the U.S government, focused on addressing drug production in source countries before it can reach American shores.

(2005), prior to the implementation of Plan Colombia, the National Alternative Development Plan -Plante- (1995-1999), had already removed the comprehensive approach that had characterized the first alternative development interventions implemented by the UNDOC since the 1980s in the country. One difference between the two was that under Plan Colombia the initial eradication of illicit crops by small coca farmers was a pre-condition to receiving government aid (Vargas, 2011). However, and despite the fact that Plan Colombia's design included participatory and sustainability components, pre-conditions to access to aid reinforced the coercive eradication strategies that were already a central part of the government's counter-narcotics policy during Plante (Tabares & Rosales, 2005). Another important difference between these two substitution programmes was the change of approach to productive projects. While under the Plante, peasant organizations played a central role in the creation and implementation of productive alternatives in the areas affected by illicit crops, during Plan Colombia the government focused efforts to incentive large companies to support and coordinate new productive opportunities through financial investments in these rural areas.

Regarding the effectiveness of the alternative development programmes launched during the two aforementioned periods, much of the academic literature argues that, in general terms, they have not been able to offer sustainable alternatives to the coca grower communities let alone improve their living conditions (Mejía, 2016). According to the academic community, there are several causes of the low effectiveness of these programmes. Vargas (2010), for example, warns that alternative development programmes in the country are not usually well connected with the plans and activities of local and regional governments. This affects the sustainability of the substitution programmes since there are conflicts between the objectives of the programme concerned with those of the regional and national development plans. This was evident during the implementation of Plante, where a centrist and simplistic stance toward the problem of illicit crops prevailed. During its implementation in the late 90s, and despite having correctly recognized the importance of establishing information channels between the different levels of government, the Plante scheme did not adequately strengthen the mechanisms initially proposed for the coordination and evaluation of the programmes, thus resulting in coordination failures between the different territorial administrations.

According to Vargas (2010, p. 23-25), the subsequent implementation of Plan Colombia further exacerbated the coordination gap between the central government and the regions. The distribution of monetary resources directed towards the regions to tackle illicit crops was determined by the regional governments' capacity to process and present projects on their own. This became a structural problem of the plan and ended up further marginalizing the poorest municipalities and those most affected by illicit crops since they did not have the institutional capacity or the technical knowledge necessary to develop projects that met the conditions imposed by the national government. Additionally, with the strengthening of a criminalization approach under Plan Colombia, the government increased aerial fumigation actions during this period, which were usually imposed without any consultation with local governments (Ramirez, 2001, p.229).

A similar disconnection problem occurred within the government's own anti-drug policy. Several authors argue that anti-drug policy in Colombia has often had conflicting objectives due to a lack of articulation among its different strategies (Ramirez, 2005; Vargas, 2010). Alternative development programmes, for example, are often implemented in conjunction with aerial spraying strategies. This, despite the negative effects that the latter has had on the relationship between communities and the institutions of the national government (Cruz & Chaparro, 2017, p. 39). This lack of clarity in the approach adopted to combat the production of illicit crops, as well as the lack of coordination in the implementation of these strategies, often has negative impacts on institutional trust on the part of farming families. This is exemplified in some documented cases of families who, despite having voluntarily started participating in alternative development projects, have had crops erroneously fumigated, frustrating their attempts at building new livelihoods (see Huezo, 2017). Scepticism on the part of the communities affects their future intention to participate in alternative development programmes.

Likewise, the instability of the government's substitution programmes greatly affects their sustainability over time. Programmes aimed at substituting illicit crops should guarantee alternative livelihoods for coca grower families in the long term (reference). In Colombia, however, these programmes usually have limited funds and are formulated only to respond to short-term challenges, without considering a comprehensive strategy

that transcends to the medium and long term (Sánchez, 2005). This lack of continuity further aggravates the lack of trust that the communities have in the government. An example of this was the case of the ‘Familias Guardabosques’ (Ranger Families) programme (2005-2012), which consisted of providing subsidies to coca grower families so that they did not grow coca and instead committed to protecting the natural parks. According to Vargas (2011), this programme only offered temporary relief to these families, which ended when the programme collapsed.

Finally, a number of authors have considered the low capacity of substitution programmes to adapt to the local contexts of coca grower communities (Álvarez, 2005; Rincón-Ruiz et al, 2016). Álvarez (2005), for example, claims that alternative development in the Andean countries has not worked because the needs of the local communities affected by drug trafficking have not been considered. The author suggests that a large part of the interventions have been ‘imposed from the outside’ and that no one has worried about whether the programmes are appropriate for these communities. This view is also supported by Rincón-Ruiz et al (2016), who emphasize that the conditions necessary for the implementation of crop substitution programmes should match the reality of the communities where coca is grown.

In the international context, Buxton (2015) states that the ability of these programmes to connect with local communities is essentially conditioned by the current legal framework, which criminalizes coca growers. This approach prevents these policies from promoting citizen participation and empowerment, which are essential elements to guarantee the design of a coherent and sustainable programme. In the case of Colombia, a large portion of the coca growing families live in isolated and insecure places due to the presence of different armed groups. In this regard, Buxton argues that the presence of the national government in these areas should not be limited to exercising control over illicit crops and thus becoming just one more actor in the conflict. On the contrary, it is necessary for the government to recognize its social obligations towards the communities. This also implies that farmers must first be treated as citizens and the future of Colombia’s development rather than as criminals to be eradicated.



This section has attempted to provide a brief summary of the literature relating to the main issues within the AD programmes in Colombia. These issues explain why substitution programmes have not been able to make significant changes in the livelihoods of coca grower communities. Thus, this paper has listed four main structural problems within the crop substitution programmes. First, these programmes have faced a lack of coordination between the different government levels in the country. Likewise, a contradictory national anti-drug framework, which measures the effectiveness of AD programmes with the same criteria as that of forced eradication activities, has been described. Third, crop substitution programmes have had low levels of sustainability, mainly due to a lack of financial resources, but also because of the initial poor design of the programmes. And finally, the literature describes a disconnection between the objectives of AD programmes and the local contexts.

Despite criticism, the vast majority of researchers agree that, with the necessary corrections, AD programmes represent the only strategy that can bring about real progress on the situation of the coca grower communities in Colombia. (Tabares & Rosales, 2005; UNODC & Government of Colombia, 2015; Vargas, 2010, Álvarez, 2005, p. 13; Rincón-Ruíz et al, 2016). Among the different problems facing these programmes, the low participation of the different actors involved jumps out as a common element to be addressed. In Colombia, decisions and policies regarding illicit crops are usually made in talks between the United States and the national government. This reflects a top-down approach in the design and implementation of these programmes, in which the voices of other actors (local governments, civil society, and local communities) are not comprehensively considered.

## **2.6 Conclusion.**

This chapter examined three main themes, which are essential in this research. First, it provided some historical and political background on Colombia, its internal armed conflict, and the main actors in it. This first part provided insights about the Colombian context to understand why coca-production is an important issue in the country, since it

is linked to other social, political, and economic challenges of the country. An important reflection on the history of the country and its armed conflict is that political participation has been difficult to guarantee for the vast majority of Colombians, especially for those living in remote rural areas where there is not even state presence. Poverty, the armed conflict and the little institutional capacity of the government are some of the factors that have allowed coca production to find an ideal place to settle here. In the second part of the chapter, the academic literature on forced eradication strategies was reviewed. It was argued that these strategies have not been able to offer definitive results to coca-growing families because they do not address the true causes of coca production. In the third part, the literature on past alternative development programmes as well as their effectiveness in improving the livelihoods of coca-growing communities were reviewed. These programmes have had important flows and limitations which have negatively impact their effectiveness. Among all the aspects to improve, participation turned out to be one of the most prevalent. These findings will be considered again at the moment of exploring the PNIS in the Chapter 5.

### **Chapter 3: Participatory Approaches to Development**

In the section that follows, I will outline the theoretical framework in which the analysis of this research is based. First, I will present a summary of the history of participation in development theory. In doing so, I will highlight the diversity of participatory approaches to development as participation has been an approach utilised and critiqued by different schools of thought for decades. Secondly, I will discuss some typologies of participation based on academic literature. Third, I will explore the critique that these approaches have faced in the last decade concerning their theoretical underpinnings as well as their effectiveness and applicability in practice. This latter will help me to make comparisons between the ‘red flags’ exposed by the literature and the situation of the PNIS in practice. Finally, I will outline some of the principles proposed by Chambers to describe the ways participation should be carried out in development. Later in this research I will use these principles as a guide for the analysis of the participation and effectiveness of the anti-drug policies of the Colombian Government and the PNIS in improving coca-growing communities’ livelihoods.

#### **3.1 History of Participatory Approaches to Development.**

The idea of civic participation is not a new concept. On the contrary, the recognition of participation as an essential aspect in the political organization of our societies, as well as a tool for reaching a consensus for the common good, dates back several centuries. Current ideas on participation and decentralization are reflected in various ancient cultures and civilizations such as in ancient Athens, some peoples of pre-European Africa, in religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and so on (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). According to Mansuri & Rao (2013), modern notions of participation emerged around the 18th and 19th centuries and have been largely influenced by the work of Rousseau and John Stuart Mill.

According to Rousseau’s vision of democracy, participation is not only a tool for decision-making – it also has an educational role. Participation allows members of a

community to develop empathy for the positions of others, and thus achieve consensus. In the 19th century, Mill, following Rousseau's approaches, argued that participation provides people with a feeling of self-esteem and belonging (Warner, 2001). He also stated that the principle of participation requires all members of a society participate in decision-making to the maximum extent possible (Warner, 2001). However, for this principle to be fulfilled, he stressed that it was also necessary for people to be formed with values and virtues. Only in this way could they positively influence decision-making, as well as exercise political control over those responsible for the government (Mansuri & Rao, 2012).

Mill's vision of participation was later adopted and developed by different philosophers throughout the 19th century. These thinkers advanced the idea that decentralization and the participation of free citizens in decision-making was the ideal setting for the political and social development of societies. Among these critics of state centralism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Henry Maine occupies an important place. Based on his experiences in India as an adviser to the British government, and Mill's ideas, Maine developed the theory of the village community. In this theory, Maine postulated that community organizations could develop organizational systems very similar to participatory democracies (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Among one of the advantages of this type of organization over that of centralized government, is its ability to respond to external changes in a much more fluid and fair way for all its members.

Thus, participatory development and decentralization have a common origin (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). In addition to this, both concepts share the idea that participation has both intrinsic and instrumental value. Intrinsically, participation provides people with greater satisfaction with the decisions in which their voices are considered, while also developing their ability to relate to each other to reach agreements collectively (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). Instrumentally, participation allows people to exercise political control over public institutions and the market.

After World War II, community development was the first approach to development that included the participation of the target population in developmental interventions. Community development refers to development programmes implemented by the main colonial powers in their colonies during the period between the 1940s and 1970s. The objective of these programmes, in a broad sense, was to improve the living conditions of rural communities located in their colonies (and later in the newly independent countries) through the involvement of the beneficiaries in development projects (Smyth, 2004)

During the Cold War, the United States government launched community development programmes in various countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to provide rural communities with an alternative to communism. By the end of the 1960s, however, many of these programmes were abandoned as they were unable to meet their proposed objectives of social and economic well-being for rural communities (Ruttan, 1984). Most of these programmes were unable to learn from their past experiences and faced problems of rent-seeking at the local level (Mansuri & Rao, 2012; Korten, 1980).

Thus, between the 1960s and 1970s, the attention of governments and international organizations turned to neoclassical models of economic growth, which depended on a centralized structure of political and economic decision making. Under these models, people's participation was relegated to the simple election of political representatives (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). During this period, community development programmes were viewed with suspicion by political leaders in developing countries who questioned their effectiveness in ensuring either the economic development of rural areas or the change in local power structures within communities (Ruttan, 1984).

In the 1970s, a group of radical critics and economists strongly questioned this mainstream thinking. They pointed out that the results of development programmes under this centralized vision of policies and interventions were limited. Furthermore, its negative effects on populations and the environment were not being adequately addressed. Among the radicals who most influenced the debate on the shortcomings of structuralist models is Paulo Freire, who highlighted the importance of learning

environments that allow people to express their needs and thus be able to achieve development (Mohan, 2014). This participatory approach to development was called 'Emancipatory Participation', and its supporters advocated for a popular education that empowered communities and citizens (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Thus, people could analyse and oppose the power structures that "oppressed" them.

The alternative development (AD) approach<sup>5</sup> also emerged during the 1970s. Promoters of AD advocated for a much more participatory and people-centred approach to development (Pieterse, 1998). Like the emancipatory Participation approach, AD agreed on the need to empower people in the search for social justice (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Although key elements of AD such as participation and the importance of local knowledge were accepted by a good part of the academic community, this approach was not without criticism. Hettne (1990) pointed out that AD did not offer a true alternative to the mainstream development paradigm. According to him, this development approach did not have a clear theoretical structure and, on the contrary, it gathers diverse positions from different lines of thought that in practice may not even be compatible. Despite the criticism, several of the key elements within the development vision of AD, such as attention to participation and the use of local knowledge, to be absorbed by the mainstream development approach. This generated important changes within the direction of the dominant paradigm, which gradually began to focus its attention not only on economic growth but also on human development (Pieterse, 1998).

### ***3.1.1 Participatory Development***

Around the 1980s, the concept of participation also had a great impact on how development programmes were implemented at the grassroots level. The participatory development approach originated with notable scholars such as Chambers. He suggested

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<sup>5</sup> In this section, Alternative Development refers to the broad development approach, not to the specific alternative development programmes aimed at combating illicit crops such as those mentioned in chapter two and which are the subject of analysis in this research.

that “putting the last first” was the only way to achieve rural development (Chambers, 1997).

Unlike AD, the participatory development approach is characterized by focusing on analysing participation within development projects rather than broader political communities (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Thus, its attention is focused on how development agencies, professionals and participants relate. Their main concern is to ensure that the programmes are characterized by working under a bottom-up approach where local participants can use their knowledge to analyse and act. Likewise, the efforts of its proponents focus on determining the correct way to carry out development projects so that there is a flow of information and reciprocal learning between development professionals and participants (Chambers, 1997).

According to advocates of Participatory Development, ‘normal development’ is characterized by eurocentrism, positivism and top-downism (Chambers, 1997). These biases are disempowering with the locals since they seek to equate development with modernity as reached in western societies where decisions are hierarchized and taken only by experts (Joshi, 2014). In rejecting these biases, Participatory development has focused on the development processes at the grassroots level, allowing a plurality of development goals as well as providing local people with the self-determination they need (Mohan, 2014; 133).

In practice, participatory development has shown diverse results, which is the product of the diverse forms of participation implemented during development interventions. Mohan (2014) recounts three well-known examples of participatory development in practice: The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India), the donor’s poverty reduction strategies (PRS) during the ‘90s and the case of the Mexican Zapatistas. In the first example, he notes that participation was used as a mechanism aimed at creating consensus between the community and the already preconceived objectives of the programme. In the second example, he suggests that participation in the PRS only generated invited spaces of

participation<sup>6</sup> and, in some cases, not all stakeholders were taken into account. Lastly, in the case of the Mexican Zapatistas, he highlights that there was a political force pressing for a different way of understanding development, which aimed to generate changes in local governance processes. After considering all these scenarios, Mohan affirms that, depending on each situation and context, the nature of participation can vary, since it must be adapted to what is either envisaged and/or possible.

Participatory development is usually linked to the implementation of the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Chambers proposed PRA as a method to ensure the involvement of local participants in development programmes. The PRA was well received by the development community and spread around the world among a range of NGOs and international organizations (Chambers, 1994b; Cornwall & Pratt, 2011).

According to Chambers (1994a), PRA is a set of approaches and methods that seek to allow rural communities to analyse, share and enhance their knowledge of life and living conditions to plan and act. PRA had its origin in the late 1980s and 1990s as one of the approaches that evolved out of the Rapid Rural Appraisal<sup>7</sup> (RRA) (Leurs, 1996). Unlike the RRA, however, the PRA not only recognizes the importance of local knowledge but also the analytical capacity of local people to make use of it (Chambers, 1994a). Similarly, under this approach, development practitioners are called to facilitate, through participatory processes, the development and empowerment of communities rather than just taking an extractive and elicited position on knowledge (Chambers, 1992).

These role changes that both development practitioners and local people had under PRA had a significant on the development community, especially among NGOs. The latter played a crucial role in the refinement and innovation of methods within the PRA (Chambers, 1994a). The objective of the interventions was to empower local communities

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<sup>6</sup> Invited spaces of participation/induced participation refers to those formal mechanisms of participation where development agents invite stakeholders to collaborate and build consensus.

<sup>7</sup> RRA is a method originated in the 1970s to obtain knowledge about rural life and conditions. Its origins are linked to the dissatisfaction with the bias towards urban development and with traditional ways of collecting data in rural communities.



in order to create sustainable local actions and institutions over time (Chambers, 1994b). In this sense, local knowledge is a resource that belongs to local people and that they can share and improve if they are given the necessary tools. Thus, the role of outsiders is to catalyse knowledge sharing to ensure rapport, as well as to be self-critical.

The PRA uses different methods to make it easier for locals to analyse and share their knowledge. These methods are usually participatory processes where local people interact, share, and analyse their ideas. Some of these methods include participatory mapping and modelling, transect walks, matrix scoring and ranking, discussion groups, etc. What these methods have in common is that they are participatory and essentially visual. The latter removes some of the barriers that prevent some community members from fully expressing their ideas, especially if they are non-literate (Bar-On & Prinsen, 1999).

Among the new ideas that the PRA has brought forward is the insight that local people have the capability to recognise their own needs, as well as the solutions to the obstacles they face (Chambers, 1994b). PRA highlights the importance of building rapport on the part of the visitor within the communities and PRA methods such as participatory diagramming and visual sharing allow the entire community to benefit from the shared information. In this sense, local knowledge is not only extracted and used by the visitor as was usually the case under RRA. Finally, the sequence in which these methods are implemented has generated several positive results. First, this has allowed an increase in the commitment of project participants. Second, this has facilitated information triangulation processes. Third, the knowledge obtained using different PRA methods can easily be aggregated, thus enriching the information obtained through each method individually.

The participatory development approach, as well as the PRA, have become very popular, but have also been widely critiqued. Several critiques of this approach point to the fact that there is a lack of attention to the institutional burdens that affect local communities but at the same time are beyond their control (Green, 2010). On the other hand, there is

the idea that the communities are homogeneous, ignoring the existing power relations at the local level (Williams, 2004). The main criticisms of participatory development and participation in development overall will be discussed later (in Section 3.3).

### ***3.1.2 Participatory Citizenship and Governance.***

In recent years the concept of participation has begun to be reconsidered not only at the level of development projects, but also at the level of public policy (Mohan, 2014). Under this new scenario, the concept of participation has begun to move towards the concept of participatory citizenship. This approach seeks to improve our understanding of participation not only at the individual and local level but also from a broader perspective that includes the role of institutions (Hickey & Mohan, 2004).

In the past, the gap between citizens and institutions was addressed by taking one of two approaches (Gaventa, 2003). Some focused on strengthening citizens' participation within the political system to improve their ability to influence the actions of institutions. Others considered that the analysis should focus on how institutional accountability and response capacity can be ensured. Recent studies, however, have begun to recognize the importance of working on both sides of the problem (see Gaventa, 2004; Aulich, 2009; Koonings, 2004).

“This reframing of participation as citizenship situates participatory development in a broader range of socio-political practices, through which people extend their status and rights as members of particular political communities” (Mohan, 2014, p. 135). This extension of the notion of participation as citizenship has found ways of uniting liberal, communitarian, and civic republican ideas of citizenship. Thus, the notion of participation as citizenship combines a liberal emphasis on individual rights with a communitarian focus on belonging and the civic republican focus on processes of deliberation, collective action, and responsibility (Gaventa, 2003). The result of this new comprehensive notion of citizenship conceives participation as a right, which implies that citizen plays an active role as makers and shapers of the public policy.

### 3.2 Types of Participation

The adoption of the term participation by different schools of thought, as well as by various national and international organizations, has led to the concept being used to achieve different and, in some cases, even opposite aims. Pretty (1993) argues that participation has been used to extend the control of the government as well as to develop capacity building and self-resilience; it has been used to justify external decisions as well as to empower and involve local communities in decision making, etc. To clarify the use of the term participation, she created a typology of participation in which she describes seven types of participation that can take place in a development project. These range from manipulative or passive participation, where local communities have little or null participation, to self-mobilization, where communities do not need external institutions and they generate their own spaces for participation.

Pretty's different types of participation can also be grouped into two more general types of participation that are commonly referenced in academic literature: namely, induced (invited or inorganic) and organic (imminent) participation. Induced participation refers to participation promoted through policy actions of the state (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). Organic participation, on the other hand, is endogenously driven by social movements aimed at changing structures of power within society. In this sense, we could classify Pretty's types of participation into these two more general types of participation as shown in **Table 1**.

	<b>Table 1. Pretty's Typology of Participation</b>	
I N D U C E D	<b>Manipulative Participation</b>	People's representatives are not elected and don't have power in the decision process.
	<b>Passive Participation</b>	People are told what has been decided and gathered information is owned by external actors.
	<b>Participation by consultation</b>	People participate by being consulted or answering questions. External actors manage gathering information processes and analysis. Development professionals are not obligated to use people's contributions.
	<b>Participation for material incentives</b>	People participate by contributing with resources such as labour in return for food, cash, or other incentives. They are not part of the learning process and they normally don't continue using the knowledge provided after the end of the incentive.

O R G A N I C	<b>Functional participation</b>	Participation is seen as the means to achieve project goals. This can be interactive and involve shared decision making. However, the objectives and goals of the project are predetermined by external agencies.
	<b>Interactive participation</b>	People participate in joint analysis, action plans, and the formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right rather than the means to achieve project goals. The process involves interdisciplinary processes that seek different perspectives and make use of systematic and structured learning processes. Local people take control over local resources and institutions.
	<b>Self-mobilization</b>	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need but retain control over how resources are used.

**Table 1. Pretty's Typology of Participation.** Source: adapted from Pretty (1993).

### 3.3. Critique of Participation and Participatory Approaches to Development.

The participatory approaches to development have been vigorously challenged in recent years by several writers. Cooke & Kothari (2001) grouped some main arguments against participatory development in their book name 'Participation: The New Tyranny?'. They use the term 'tyrannies' to describe the consequences produced by participatory development that tend to be minimized by the development community. In their book, they argue that participation has become a new orthodoxy and its relevance and effectiveness within development processes are rarely questioned. They identify three categories of tyrannies, namely: "the tyranny of the decision-making and control" (Do facilitators override existing valid decision-making processes?), "the tyranny of the group" (Do group dynamics and decisions lead to less beneficial outcomes?) and "the tyranny of method" (Do participatory methods override others with more advantages?).

These tyrannies are the result of not properly addressing and recognizing the limits and obstacles that participation and participatory approaches face. Among the greatest obstacles to be addressed are existing power relations, which can be found not only

outside communities but at a local level. Participatory development has been criticized for its uncritical view of “the community”. The community is often idealized and seen as uniform, unproblematic, uncorrupted, and characterized by solidaristic relations (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). However, some authors have highlighted the importance of recognizing that there are power relations at the local level that play a crucial role in defining the course of development projects (Kyamusugulwa, 2013). These power relations normally go unnoticed as they are internalized under social norms and culture (Williams, 2004). Mosse (2001), for instance, suggests that within participatory development interventions, those who are more articulate and that hold a better position within the structures of local power are often the ones who guide participatory dialogue and final decisions.

Other critics of participatory development highlight the lack of attention to institutions, especially informal ones, which also have a great impact on communities’ livelihoods. Cleaver (2001) argues that participatory development has only considered formal institutions within its analysis, while informal ones are normally left untouched. The latter, according to Cleaver, configure wider structural factors that shape relations and conditions within communities. The author also warns that when they are not considered, informal institutions can end up determining the most important decisions and interactions, leaving empty the formal spaces for participation. Another important point highlighted by Cleaver is that strong institutions (formal and informal) are not the only requirement for communities to develop. On the contrary, there are also limitations related to a lack of material resources or structural constraints out of communities’ control that impede the functioning of development interventions and activities.

Development programmes also need to have a deep understanding of contexts and politics (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). This attention must be directed at both the community and national levels since certain variables are beyond the control of the communities. The nature of the local state, and the relationship of communities with the different levels of government, play a critical role in the way development processes unfold. Both the strengthening of local communities and the capacity of governments to respond to the needs of the latter are critical to the effectiveness of participatory development.

### **3.4. Principles of Participation**

As noted above, Chambers is one of the main advocates of participatory development and PRA. In this section, some of the key principles of PRA will be presented, as described by Chambers (1994a; 1994b). The intention is to outline these principles to then use them as a guide to explore and analyse participation within the PNIS as well as in some past anti-drug programmes in Colombia. Because of the informational limitations of desk-based research, as well as the nature of the PNIS, only the principles that can relate the most to this programme will be presented.

**3.4.1 A reversal of learning:** In PRA, the outsider learns from the locals. Local knowledge is valuable, and it is considered and used during the implementation of the development project.

**3.4.2. Learning rapidly and progressively:** Improvisation, interaction, flexibility, and adaptability are welcome during the learning process. There is no blueprint programme.

**3.4.3. Seeking diversity:** The idea is to seek variability in the information collected.

**3.4.4. They do it:** Development agents work only as facilitators during the investigation, analysis, presentation, and learning processes. Local people generate and own their outcomes while also learning and enhancing their analytical capabilities.

**3.4.5. Sharing:** Information is shared by community members, between them and facilitators, and between different development agents.

**3.4.6. Empowering local people:** The idea is to empower local communities so that they can access the political, economic and social structures of which they were previously not a part.

**3.4.7 Sustainable local actions and institutions:** The PRA seeks sustainable outcomes sustained by local communities over time.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the theoretical framework in which the research relies on. First, a summary of the history of participatory approaches to development was presented. This chapter has also shown that participation has a long and complex history. It has been subject of special attention in development literature as well as within the different development approaches. More recent participatory approaches have begun to reflect on the initial constraints highlighted by critics to enhance their development impacts. In the second part of this chapter, Pretty's typology of participation was outlined to analyse the type of local participation that might characterise the PNIS and some previous AD programmes in general (Objective 2). Finally, the analysis of the critique and principles of participation will be used to critically explore the quality of the community participation in the PNIS (and the AD programmes in general) as well as the role of this latter aspect within the overall effectiveness of these interventions (Objective 3 & 4).

## **Chapter 4: Research Design**

This research report explores the current Comprehensive National Programme for the substitution of illicit crops in Colombia (PNIS) has been in improving the living conditions of the coca-growing communities in Colombia. The data in the study was collected through the use of two well-known data collection methods in qualitative research: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. In this chapter I will discuss the methodology used in this research, how the data was gathered, the limitations of the present study, as well as some ethical considerations.

### **4.1 Methodology**

The research data discussed in this report was gathered through the adoption of a qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research intends to understand, describe and explain social phenomena and the world ‘out there’ ‘from the inside’ (Rapley, 2008). Unlike the positivist approach, the qualitative approach appreciates subjectivities and values the existence of different perspectives and interpretations of the same phenomenon while trying to explain the conditions of these differences (Overton & van Diemen, 2003). It also seeks to delve into social complexities in order to better understand the relationships, processes and belief systems that are present within societies and institutions beyond individual awareness (Flick, 2014). This type of research approach is ideal for those research questions that require a deep understanding of people's lives and their social circumstances; those to which a quantified answer cannot be offered because its ultimate purpose is to understand the complexities of reality itself (O’Leary, 2017).

The above definition fits the descriptive and exploratory characteristics of the research question in this report. This report explores the effectiveness of the Colombian government's crop substitution programmes. However, unlike the quantitative measures used by the government to track progress (namely, the number of hectares eradicated), this research focuses on evaluating the capacity of such programmes in generating



improvements both in living conditions and in the level of empowerment of coca grower communities. The choice of this theoretical framework is based on the widespread call from the academic community about the need to adopt a development approach to evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes (Vargas, 2011; Buxton, 2015; Mejía, 2016); as well as criticism regarding the top-down approach that has characterized the implementation of previous programmes (Ramírez, 2001; Vargas, 2010; Buxton, 2015). This disconnect between government policies and people's reality requires efforts to be made to obtain a better understanding of the complex dynamics that characterize local contexts of coca-growing communities as well as their effects on substitution programmes. It is in this sense that a qualitative approach is more appropriate, as it can capture the intricate meanings and "richness" that reality offers and that might otherwise be lost (O'Leary, 2017).

## **4.2 Methods**

Data collection was conducted following a strategy that combined two components. First, the preliminary collection of secondary data through document analysis and, subsequently, the conduct of semi-structured interviews with key actors. The objective of this strategy was to have different data collection methods to then be able to contrast, triangulate and validate the information obtained from the different data sources (O'Leary, 2017).

### ***4.2.1 Document analysis***

O'Leary (2017) defines document analysis as a research tool to collect, review, and analyse different types of written material as a primary source of information. The rationale behind this method resides in the proposition that secondary data can offer valuable information to answer a research question different from the research question(s) for which it was originally collected (Vartanian, 2010).

In this study, it was possible to obtain useful information on the PNIS as well as on past crop substitution programmes in Colombia through this collection method. During this first phase of the research, about 60 documents were reviewed and analysed such as peer-reviewed journals, official publications on the PNIS, policy reports, news, as well as previous studies conducted by research centres in Colombia. Some of them, despite being useful to understand aspects that affect this programme, were not relevant to the aim of this research. The documents that most contributed to the study on the PNIS are referenced throughout chapter 5, among them is the 2016 peace agreement (Chapter 4 on the PNIS), the most recent UNODC reports on PNIS, the Ideas para la Paz Foundation reports on the programme, as well as several scientific articles.

Document analysis was not, however, an easy task. Despite being very useful, this collection method represents some challenges for the researcher. First, since secondary data is produced for different purposes, trying to use it to answer other research questions can lead to problems such as lack of relevance or the presence of author biases (O’Leary, 2017). Another source of bias, on the other hand, comes from the researcher himself, since his interpretation of the information is inevitably marked by his reality.

In that regard, it is worth mentioning that the document analysis that was carried out was framed under the lens of participatory approaches to development. The choice of this approach to carry out the analysis is justified by the previously mentioned need to analyse the effectiveness of substitution programmes from a development perspective that also addresses the top-down approach that has characterized these programmes and which has already been recognized by some authors.

The use of a theoretical framework sought to reduce personal biases on the data. In addition to this, the document analysis was performed considering factors such as the author's intention, the context, etc. Finally, as mentioned above, the information obtained from the interviews facilitated the process of validating the information.

#### **4.2.2 Interviews**

The second component of the data collection strategy implemented was the carrying out of semi-structured interviews with key actors. Interviewing is one of the most common data collection methods in qualitative research and can provide valuable descriptive information about the phenomena being studied (O'Leary, 2017). In this investigation, a total of three interviews were conducted to capture the perspectives and interpretations of different actors on the effectiveness of PNIS in Colombia. The study participants were selected through snowball sampling and were either workers in research centres specialised in the study of illicit crops or representatives of coca growers' organizations in Colombia. Interviews with experts have become a popular method to collect data in qualitative research (Bogner and Menz, 2002a as cited in Bogner, Litting, Menz, 2009). Talking to experienced people can be more efficient and less time-consuming than other collection methods and is especially useful when gaining access to particular information is complicated (Bogner, Littig, Menz, 2009). In this research, I decided to work with key informants, in part, because of the impossibility of conducting interviews directly with the coca growers due to the insecure context of the areas where illicit crops are grown in the country, as well as the technical and time limitations involved in a 60 credit research report.

Working with key actors and highly experienced individuals represented both benefits and challenges. On the one hand, having the perspective of experts was useful to triangulate and validate the information that had been obtained through document analysis. Likewise, interviews were a source of important and, in some cases, interesting data that helped meet the objectives of the research. In this sense, the data provided by key informants was used both to confirm the accuracy and as a primary source of qualitative data (O'Leary, 2017). On the other hand, the involvement of informants also required careful analysis and interpretation work to detect and appreciate the biases of the information provided (discussed below).

The analysis process of the material gathered from the interviews followed the steps suggested by Meuser & Nagel (2009) for managing expert knowledge. (1) Transcription: In this first step, a transcription of the whole interviews was made. (2) Paraphrase: The text was sequenced according to the thematic unit. (3) Coding: Paraphrased text of each interview was ordered thematically by passages. (4) Thematic comparison: passages with the same thematic from different interviews were compared. (5) Sociological conceptualization: similar and differing features from interview to interview were categorised. (6) Theoretical generalization: categories were organised based on the theoretical framework.

The thematic passages used in the research were the following: obstacles and achievements of the PNIS, comparisons with previous experiences, participation of the communities, situation of the productive projects, role of the government, differences in the PNIS after the change of government. The information collected from the interviews was organized taking that order into account. Subsequently, the responses and comments received from the participants were compared. An analysis of the responses was made considering what ideas were commonly repeated in each interview, the terms used, and the differences between each of the interviewees' opinions, etc. Finally, an analysis of the information obtained based on participatory approaches to development was made.

### **4.3 Limitations**

The findings discussed in this study were collected using two popular data collection methods in qualitative research: document analysis and semi-structured interviews with experts. One of the challenges of working with these two methods was the possible presence of biases in the information provided by the interviewees or the authors of the written material. Through the chosen strategy, I sought to reduce these potential biases and guarantee the credibility of the results by comparing the information obtained from both sources. Despite the analysis work carried out, it is necessary to highlight that, in some cases, it is just not possible to determine an author's candour or whether a respondent is being honest or not in an interview (O'Leary, 2017).

A total of three interviews with experts and key actors such as researchers and representatives of coca grower communities were conducted during the data collection process for this research (see Table 2 below). These interviews provided important insights regarding the nature of participation in the PNIS as well as the obstacles and achievements the programme have had so far.

**Table 2. Interviewees.**

<b>Interviewees</b>	
<b>Name/Pseudonym</b>	<b>Role</b>
Ricardo*	Researcher. He has also worked with participants of the PNIS
Paulo Tovar	Coordinator of the research line on "Post-conflict and peacebuilding" of the Ideas para la Paz Foundation.
Rigoberto Abello	Technical secretary of the National Coordinator of Coca, Poppy and Marijuana Growers (COCCAM) in Caquetá.
*Name has been changed.	

The success of alternative development programmes is determined by various factors as well as by the complex dynamics typical of areas with the presence of illicit crops. This research does not intend to provide an analysis of all these variables, as some of them are outside the scope of this investigation. The objective of the present investigation is a little less ambitious, but still significant within the literature on the effectiveness of these policies. By framing the analysis of the PNIS through the lens of participatory approaches to development, it was sought to explore the quality of the community participation in these programmes as well as the role of this latter aspect within the overall effectiveness of these interventions.

#### **4.4 Ethics**

As this study involved the participation of people through online interviews, some ethical considerations were considered to guarantee that the actions carried out did not bring any harm on the participants, the researcher, or any other individual. Before conducting the interviews, a low-risk research Ethics process was completed following the Massey

University code of conduct for research involving human participants (Massey University, 2017). The ethics process included considerations regarding confidentiality, informed consent, and conflict of interest.

Actions were made to guarantee that all these considerations were put in place in the design of the research. Concerning privacy and confidentiality, it was guaranteed that both the identity and the information provided by the participants were anonymized. Likewise, information such as recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected device. Information was only accessed by the researcher and supervisor. All participants were previously informed about all these procedures.

Interviewees were invited to participate in this research voluntarily and received an explanation about the purpose of the research before the interview commenced. They were informed that their participation was not compulsory as well as their right to withdraw from the study or interview at any time. Before the start of the interviews, participants were asked if they consent to the use of their information in this study and to be recorded. It is worth noting that most of the interviewees were people with professional education and were therefore familiar with interviews due to the nature of their jobs.

There were no relevant conflicts of interest to report.

#### **4.5 Conclusion.**

This chapter explained the research process for this report which aims to explore the effectiveness of alternative development programmes in improving the livelihoods of coca-growing communities in Colombia. A qualitative approach was chosen to carry out this study as it fits the descriptive and exploratory characteristics of the research question and objectives of this research. The research methods selected also guarantee the discovery of valuable qualitative information to answer questions about the type and quality of participation in PNIS, as well as its relevance in the effectiveness of this type of programmes.

## **Chapter 5: Participation in the PNIS**

After more than three decades of efforts to control the production of illicit crops in the country, neither the production of coca nor the number of families that depend on it have decreased. Much of the academic literature on the topic argues that, to achieve long-term results, a shift in the way the problem is currently being addressed is necessary. Thus, instead of viewing the production of illicit crops from a criminalization perspective, it must be approached as a development problem. In practice, however, AD programmes - which seek to provide alternative livelihoods to producer communities - have not shown much better results in Colombia (See Chapter 2). Therefore, it is necessary to deepen the studies on these programmes to ensure that they offer the changes that local communities have been waiting for.

This research seeks to analyse one essential aspect within these programmes, the participation of the cultivating communities. This chapter will discuss participation within AD programmes in Colombia, focusing on the current PNIS. It will do this using both information gathered from the interviews as well as the document analysis. First, current situation of the PNIS is analysed. Subsequently, the role that participation has played within this programme (and previous AD experiences in the country) in improving livelihoods for coca-growing communities is explored. Finally, it will articulate the type of participation that has characterized AD programmes in Colombia based on the collected information, paying special attention to the PNIS.

### **5.1 AD in the context of Post-agreement: The Comprehensive National Programme for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS)**

The PNIS was established to address point four of the peace agreement (“Solution to the problem of illicit drugs”) signed between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP guerrillas in 2016. This programme seeks to provide a definitive solution to the problem of illicit crops in Colombia, while recognizing that its origin is linked to the lack of development in the territories, poverty, little state presence, and the armed conflict,

among other causes. Taking this into account, it was established, by the parties to the agreement, that the programme would be closely related to ‘Comprehensive Rural Reform’ (RRI) in point one of the agreement, which talks about a plan for the “structural transformation” of the Colombian countryside and the coca-growing territories (Vargas, Parada & Pérez, 2019). The aim is to dissolve the causes that gave rise to the problem of illicit crops in the first place and achieve a sustainable change in these communities (Tobón & Sierra, 2018).

In this sense, the peace agreement adopted a development approach to address the problem of illicit crops. The approach seeks, in the first instance, to provide communities with public goods as well as to strengthen the institutional presence of the state in these territories. In addition, the Government also plans to provide the coca-growing communities with alternatives and technical support to make their transition to the licit economy through the PNIS. These considerations suggested a shift from an approach of criminalizing peasant communities to one focused on the comprehensive development of these territories with a long-term perspective that would address the problem through AD and state investment (Méndez et al, 2019).

The Decree 896 of 2017 determines that the main objectives of the PNIS include overcoming the conditions of poverty in the peasant communities affected by crops for illicit use. Promoting the voluntary substitution of illicit crops, through comprehensive municipal and community substitution and alternative development plans, which must be designed with the direct participation of the communities involved. Generating policies and productive opportunities for growers. Contributing to the recovery of ecosystems and sustainable development. Strengthening the participation and capacities of peasant organizations. Strengthening the management capacities of the communities and their organizations, through their direct participation in the preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

The PNIS is made up of several parts. These components are: the Community and Municipal Plan of Substitution and Alternative Development (PISDA), The Immediate Attention Plan (PAI), and the Community Immediate Care Plan (Community PAI).



Firstly, PISDA seeks to generate comprehensive transformation in the local territories through the participation of the communities. This component is essentially related to meeting the needs of communities in terms of physical infrastructure, public services and security at the local and regional levels. The PAI on the other hand, consists of providing financial incentives to families for substitution activities and generation of productive projects. These productive alternatives are divided between those destined for short-term food security projects and those designed for the sustainability of families in the long term. Finally, the Community PAI includes measures to care for children, the elderly, etc.

Despite this ambitious commitment made by the government, embodied in the peace agreement, its formulation and implementation have been critiqued by scholars and others. Some researchers have highlighted that the programme was formulated without taking into account its financing or the limited capacity of government institutions, which have historically been unable to make a significant presence in the most remote regions of the country (Ideas para la paz, 2019; Rettberg , 2020). The limited capacity of the national government to move its institutions to areas that used to be FARC territory has facilitated the arrival of other armed groups. The presence of the latter has greatly deteriorated the already delicate security situation in these areas, which in turn has affected the participation of the communities in the PNIS (Cabra, 2019).

In the same sense, Vargas et. al (2019) suggest that point four of the agreement contains contradictory views. On the one hand, the government proposes a structural transformation through social investment and infrastructure. On the other hand, and because of the international and national political pressure, they undertook the immediate reduction of illicit crops by prematurely implementing the programme without a deep understanding of the people's needs and contexts. Likewise, the government conditioned the participation of growers in the PNIS to the eradication of their illicit crops. As a result of these changes, the initial transformative strategy of the PNIS was sacrificed and, instead, the eradication of coca plantations, in the shortest time possible, was prioritized.

The latter implies a contradiction between the search for a sustainable long-term solution and the immediacy of achieving results in the short term, which has already been shown in previous experiences to be ineffective in Colombia (Vargas, 2011). Regarding this, Ricardo<sup>8</sup>, one of the researchers consulted and who has worked in some of the beneficiary communities of the programme, affirms that:

*“One of the biggest challenges the PNIS faces is that it is not targeting territorial transformation, it has only focused on investing in families, on making transfers to them. (...) As there are no structural changes in the context of these families, only a band-aid to the problem is achieved” (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020).*

In addition to the criticism of the formulation of the PNIS and point four of the peace agreement, there are also some concerns regarding the way in which the PNIS has been implemented since it started, as well as during the last two years under the new government of President Duque. According to the ‘Ideas para la Paz’ Foundation, from the start the PNIS has had difficulties related to insufficient operational capacities, and a lack of funding, among other issues (Ideas para la Paz, 2019). These operational and financial difficulties have led to delays and errors in the implementation of the programme. Ricardo, for example, comments that "there were problems during the family enrolment process in the PNIS, due to irregularities in documentation" (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020). The latter has created disgust among the affected families, generating protests and blocking roads.

Adding to these issues, Rigoberto Abello, technical secretary of the National Coordinator of Coca, Poppy and Marijuana Growers (COCCAM) in Caquetá, suggests that during the implementation of the PNIS there was a lack of coordination between the members of the government who developed the programme and the different government bodies in charge of implementing it:

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<sup>8</sup> Name has been changed as requested by the interviewee.

*"At the local level, there is a contradiction between what was signed in the agreement and what was started to be implemented" (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020).*

Paulo Tovar, coordinator of the research line on "Post-conflict and peacebuilding" of the Ideas para la Paz Foundation, on the other hand, suggests that the lack of coordination led to the duplication of programming. He observed that during the beginning of the implementation of both the PNIS and PDET<sup>9</sup>, the RRI's main planning tool, similar actions were being carried out by both programmes in some communities. These programmes should have been coordinated to guarantee a comprehensive rural development in the long term. However, Tovar argues that:

*"(The PNIS and the PDETs) started very disjointed: for example, in the municipality of Briceño (the PNIS pilot test was carried out here) from 8 to 10 am the participatory planning committee created within the framework of the PDET met, and from 10am to 12pm the PNIS, both meetings with the same participants, the same name and different officials. Some participants said it was just the same" (P. Tovar, Interview, May 10, 2020).*

On the other hand, the provision of economic incentives and technical assistance to families has been characterized by non-compliance with the agreed time schedules (Cardona, 2019). The delay in aid has been viewed with concern by several researchers, who suggest that this could lead to a loss of trust by the participants (Ideas para la paz, 2019). This problem began early in the programme and continues with the new administration. The PNIS is designed so that once families agree to enter the PNIS, and they destroy their crops for illicit use, they must be granted a one off payment of one million eight hundred thousand pesos (only once) for self-support and food security. After this, and once the families have designed their productive projects (with technical assistance), they are granted - for a single time - the amount of nine million pesos (about

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<sup>9</sup> 'Development Programmes with a Territorial Approach'. It is a subregional programme that seeks a comprehensive transformation in rural areas of the country. As PNIS, it was also created in the context of the peace agreement. It is the main policy tool of the RRI and it is supposed to work in a coordinated manner with the PNIS.

US\$2469) to develop 'fast income projects' (short term). Then, families are provided with one million pesos a month (about US\$274) to sustain them for a year in bimonthly payments. Finally, and twelve months after the signing of the replacement agreement, the families should receive ten million pesos (about 2,743 US dollars) for the creation of long-term projects.

Currently, according to the latest UNODC report, ninety-seven percent (97%) of the nearly one hundred thousand families participating in the programme have complied with the agreement and have not replanted coca (UNODC, 2020). This is despite constant delays and non-compliance by the government. Currently, about 26 percent of families have not received any payment. On average, families are waiting to receive their first support payment 3 months late, and payments for the development of a productive project are arriving 16 months late (Ideas para la Paz, 2019). Likewise, close to forty percent have not received technical assistance, and only 1,792 (1.8%) of the nearly a hundred thousand families have received a payment related to short-term and long-term productive projects (UNDOC, 2020, p. 25)

Some scholars and activists have warned that the implementation of the PNIS has been further affected by the arrival of the new government, which had opposed the signing of the peace agreement. Mendez et. al (2019), argues that the changes in the anti-drug policy made by the new government represents some setbacks with respect to what was signed in the agreement. Among these changes is the intention to resume aerial spraying, as well as a much more criminalized public policy against the national consumption of drugs, which had been moving towards a focus on mental health. For Ricardo, the new government "has not finished the PNIS, but substitution is the least important component of the new government's anti-drug agenda" (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020). According to Ideas para la Paz (2019), the new government inherited a programme with budgetary, planning and coordination problems. The implementation of the PNIS continues, but there is great concern that the government will default on participating families. According to Abello, in the last two years COCCAM's efforts have focused on denouncing government breaches:

*"From 2018 to now, what has been taking place is a constant process of demand and complaint for the effective implementation (of the PNIS)" (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020)*

Currently, among the greatest challenges facing the programme are the lack of resources, lack of coordination, lack of political will on the part of the government, the serious insecurity in the areas due to the presence of illegal armed groups and, finally, the crucial need to reorient the approach of anti-drug policy towards a long-term perspective, focused on improving the living conditions of the communities and not only on reducing coca crops.

The present discussion should not, however, underestimate some achievements of the current substitution policy or ignore PNIS as the largest effort by the government in areas affected by illicit crops in history (Ideas para la paz, 2019). For Ramirez (2017), the peace agreement meant a positive change in the way in which coca-growing farmers are recognized within the drug discourse in the country. The cultivators went from being seen merely as criminals, to being recognized as victims of all the armed conflict, the low state presence and the dynamics of drug trafficking. This change in discourse has encouraged the active participation of the coca growing communities in the formulation and implementation of projects within the PNIS. This has been backed up by the proactive participation of the communities, whose local knowledge and lessons learned from failed programmes previously imposed by outsiders, have developed and presented their own development proposals.

## **5.2 Participation in AD programmes and the PNIS in Colombia**

Although most of the AD programmes implemented in Colombia tend to have among their objectives the promotion of direct community participation, few experiences have been able to fulfil this purpose in the last three decades in the country. In the last three decades, the participation of coca-growing communities and families in the design and implementation of these programmes, except for some specific exceptions, has been

limited or non-existent. At the end of the 1990s, the Plante had proposed to use community participation as the methodological foundation for the formulation of AD proposals (Tabares & Rosales, 2005). However, its implementation was characterized by a centralist vision of the problem by the government, which ignored the creative participation of the communities (Berdugo, 2004; Sánchez, 2005). At the beginning of the 2000s, the Uribe government stated that its AD programmes "productive projects" and "forest ranger families" were going to guarantee the participation and control of the communities over the implementation of the projects. In practice, both programmes ended up designing projects where the participation of the communities was minimal, and this generated conflicts between participants and project designers (Vargas, 2011). Indeed, according to the participants and development agents of these programmes, although there was agreement with the community in their preparation, the government did not take them into account during the design and implementation (Giraldo & Lozada, 2008).

Considering what has been learned from past experiences, and with the objective of offering a definitive solution to coca-growing families, in the peace agreement the Colombian government committed to integrally transform the territories of the coca-growing communities, as well as providing them with productive and sustainable alternatives. To achieve this, the main objectives of the PNIS were to reduce poverty in rural areas, contribute to territorial transformation, include peasants in productive processes and strengthen the participation of rural communities (Vargas et al, 2019). The agreement proposed a participatory re-construction of the territories of the coca-growing communities (Méndez et al, 2019). Performance indicators towards these objectives are also crucial and, according to the peace agreement, the progress of the programme was to be measured through indicators of well-being in the communities and not the number of hectares eradicated (Peace Agreement, 2016). A point that many academics, and the UNDOC itself, have been making for several years. Another important element to highlight is that PNIS coverage is national. This, and considering the provision of public goods and services, as well as the components of the PNIS, makes it the largest effort that the government has made to solve the problem of illicit crops to date.

One of the five principles on which the PNIS is governed is “joint, participatory and concerted construction.” According to Decree 896 of 2017, which created the PNIS, the participation of the communities is the basis for the formulation, execution, and control of productive projects in the programme. This decree also established some spaces and participatory structures to facilitate the participation of families, communities, and other key actors within the programme. In the case of the coca-growing communities, the community assemblies were established as the main participation space in which they could express and build their ideas and projects.

During the initial phase of PNIS, the assemblies were intended to allow participants to share their project ideas, as well as their main development obstacles, in order to begin building a development path that would fit their contexts and needs. However, in practice, this initial stage was marked by the government's interest in reducing the greatest number of hectares of coca in the shortest possible time.

Aragón (2019), through interviews with participating communities during this first phase of the programme in the Caquetá region, collected some comments and perspectives from farmers on what was carried out during these meetings and through the PNIS. She found that in the communities she interviewed, despite having a positive opinion of the programme's structure, there were feelings of both a lot of uncertainty and mistrust about the implementation of the PNIS. According to the communities, during these assemblies the government mostly limited itself to recruiting local support for the programme and the steps to follow, while being given only two options, whether to join the programme or not. They questioned their participation during the formulation of the plan itself and argued that, even if some of their concerns and ideas were considered on some occasions, they still felt their participation was not important.

As mentioned above, in practice, the implementation of PNIS has faced several challenges. All these aspects have affected the way in which PNIS has developed within local communities, as well as the participation of the latter in the programme. Ricardo

describes the difference between what was agreed and the implementation of the programme like this:

*“As the PNIS is designed and implemented in the peace agreement, it is very good, on paper it was very nicely done, and it aimed precisely at territorial transformation. If you compare the implementation of PNIS with what was on paper, they are totally different things” (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020)*

However, what was stated in the peace agreement regarding the PNIS was very general and did not exclude the implementation of other strategies by the government to reduce coca crops (P. Tovar, Interview, May 10, 2020, Vargas et al, 2019). This, added to the pressure from the international community due to the growing increase in crops in the country, meant that the programme was implemented prematurely in the country and that territorial transformation through community participation was sacrificed for immediate results. In an interview published by the ‘Pacifista’ website, Eduardo Díaz, director of the programme until August 2018, said the following about the implementation during that first period:

*“Despite what we desire– they were going to measure it [progress] in hectares eradicated. That is inevitable: [We had] pressure from everyone - the ‘gringos’, the opposition -they speak in hectares, even if the indicator is very harmful. In internal discussions they told me "Eduardo, to go out and talk about hectares is to distort the logic that we are seeking to transform the territories." Yes, that is true, but political circumstances compel us to do so. If I go out to talk about transforming the territories, in the end they will ask me, and how many hectares have you eradicated? " (Pacifista, August 2018)*

Vargas et al (2019), through one of their interviews, found that due to this pressure to reduce crops participatory processes were relegated to the background. One of his interviewees suggested that, although the participatory workshops were important, and



proposals were obtained from the hands of the communities, these processes took a long time and at that time it was necessary to reduce crops.

In addition to the change in focus in the initial design of the programme due to pressures to reduce coca cultivation, the premature implementation of the PNIS led to coordination problems between the different government entities. The country's institutional system did not have the resources or the necessary preparation for the implementation of the PNIS to proceed without obstacles or delay. According to Abello, there was a disconnect between what the central government had determined, and the capacity and resources its local agents had to work with in the communities (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020).

Another important aspect to consider, regarding the participation of the communities from the beginning of the implementation of the PNIS, has been the interference of different local actors within these participatory spaces. Some of these spaces have been captured by intermediary organizations that claim to represent the communities (Ideas para la paz, 2019). Similarly, armed actors such as FARC dissidents, paramilitaries and criminal gangs have tried to affect the participation of communities in the programmes through manipulation or intimidation (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020; Ideas para la paz, 2019). Several social leaders who have sought to make the replacement programme visible and socialize it with ownership in their communities have been assassinated over recent years by these illegal groups (Montenegro, 2020).

### ***5.2.1 Participation in the PNIS during the Duque government.***

Although the PNIS had already started with structural failures and poor performance, the new government's even greater emphasis on forced eradication strategies has further degraded the programme (Vargas et al., 2019). The Duque government's criminalizing approach has undermined the idea of integrally transforming rural areas through the participation of communities. Although it should be noted that the programme is still in operation, it is not being given the investment it needs to succeed. This is illustrated by the lack of political will to complete payments to the participating families, who are still

waiting to be compensated for their work towards transformation (Sanín, Pérez & Crintancho, 2019). According to Ricardo, during the administration of the new government, the participation of the communities within the programme has been reduced:

*“With the Duque government, the issue of participation and consensus has been greatly reduced. Everything is no longer negotiated, nor is everything discussed. This part has been lost”. (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020)*

Abello, from COCCAM, in this same sense, suggests that the new government has not opened new communication spaces and, on the contrary, has dedicated itself to instrumentalizing them:

*“The government has proposed to close spaces for participation for the communities. It has manipulated them, that is, they only come to present reports and then leave”. (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020)*

This attitude on the part of the government puts the effectiveness of the programme at risk, since the communities initially entered the PNIS thanks to the participatory spaces it offered, and which allowed them to be heard (Sanín et al, 2020). In these spaces, the communities had been able to formulate projects and strengthen spaces for dialogue with the government (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020; Vargas et al, 2019). Currently, the programme is working in a unidirectional way, that is, from top to bottom. An example of this is the government's decision to limit the productive options for farmers. According to Abello, at the beginning people could propose their productive idea, but now they must choose between 5 options: sugarcane, palm, coffee, livestock and cocoa (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020).

### **5.3 Conclusion.**

A large part of the AD projects implemented in Colombia in recent decades have included a participatory component in their intervention plans. These plans have written about the importance of allowing people to participate during the formulation and implementation stages. However, this has not translated to community participation in the field. The ‘Participation’ has been, both involuntarily and intentionally, used as a “buzzword” in the designs of these programmes (Cornwall, 2007). This is problematic considering that community participation within AD programmes is key to guaranteeing sustainable results in the long term (Sánchez, 2005; Vargas, 2011). And even though the PNIS was supposed to address this essential flaw within AD interventions, after going through different stages of the programme, it was possible to identify that the participation of communities within the current AD programme has also been limited.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion**

The information gathered through the interviews and the document analysis made it possible to identify some of the main features of participation within the PNIS. The participation of local communities within AD programmes is essential to ensure their long-term effectiveness and sustainability (Unlu & Kapti, 2012). In Colombia, several authors insist on the need to guarantee the participation of coca-growing communities within these programmes (Vargas, 2010; Vélez & Lobo, 2019; Ortega, 2018).

The participation of peasant farmers is necessary for both building consensus concerning the implementation of the programme, as well as the ownership of the process by communities themselves (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). In the PNIS, although most of the communities began their participation in the programme with great enthusiasm, at present they are disappointed and in a precarious position because of the actions of the government (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020). Furthermore, some of these communities have not felt included in any of the implementation phases of the programme, further aggravating the disconnect between the plan's objectives and the results obtained so far (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020; Aragón, 2019). This situation worries some NGOs, as they fear that the programme does not meet the needs or expectations of the participant communities, and they have no choice but to re-plant coca (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020).

The instrumental value of participation has not been considered in the PNIS either. Instead of boosting the analytical capacity of the communities and the use of their local knowledge, the government has only limited itself, so far, to provide them with financial assistance which does not generate any real or sustainable impact on their livelihoods in the long term ( R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020). On the other hand, the ability of some of these communities to exercise political control over public institutions has not been the product of an intentional government measure. In other words, it has not been the consequence of a public strategy that seeks to improve the institutional responsibility and response capacity of the government. Rather, this has been the result of the use of

social capital belonging to local communities, and the accumulation of knowledge over time. This has allowed communities to develop organic participatory processes (Ramírez, 2017; P. Tovar, Interview, May 10, 2020). Vélez & Lobo (2019) argue that the social capital found in some coca-growing communities should be used as a means to guarantee sustainable solutions in the long term. The government should support and protect these social assets which have been built by some of these communities.

Another aspect to consider about the PNIS is its ability to address internal and external institutional limitations that hinder the course of productive projects in communities. In this sense, the PDET and the PNIS were intended to work together to address not only the search for production alternatives for the communities (through PNIS) but also the structural development problems facing their regions (through the PDET), such as the lack of basic services and connectivity problems. In practice, as mentioned above, both programmes started at very different times and with coordination problems (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020; P. Tovar, Interview, May 10, 2020). In the case of PNIS, it was possible to identify external and internal variables that have not been adequately addressed during implementation and that have negatively impacted the programme. Among the external variables is the worrying wave of violence in some of the regions where the programme is being implemented. Promoters of the PNIS community assemblies as well as members of COCCAM have been killed or threatened (Sanín, Machuca & Cristancho, 2019). After the demobilization of the former FARC-EP, the government has had difficulties in taking control in some of these areas, which has left many families with an unsustainable burden.

Internally, the communities also have limitations that affect participatory processes and these have not been adequately considered by the government. According to Ideas para la Paz (2019), some of the spaces for participation have been captured by external and internal agents with interests opposed to those of the communities. This is the case of some members of Community Action Boards, who have had little transparent practices during the participant selection stage. As Williams (2004) suggests, it is important to pay attention to local institutions, as better-positioned members within local power structures often guide the direction of projects. The above shows the importance of paying attention

to participatory processes and understanding that AD programmes require a long-term perspective.

## **6.1 Principles of Participation in PNIS**

In this section, an analysis of the principles of participatory development within PNIS will be made. The latter were previously discussed in section 3.4. This analysis will be based on the information obtained from the interviews and the document analysis that was carried out. It is worth mentioning that the conclusions presented here do not seek to give a definitive judgment on participation within the PNIS in the different locations and moments of its implementation, since this would require a greater number of interviews and information. Also, and as mentioned above, some principles, which cannot be easily related to the programme, will not be part of this analysis due to the limitations of a desk-based investigation. Only the initially selected principles will be analysed. Despite the limitations, the exercise developed allows us to explore, in a general way, how the participatory component of the PNIS has been implemented in the country, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses found.

### ***6.1.1 A reversal of learning: In PRA, the outsider learns from the locals. Local knowledge is valuable, and it is considered and used during the implementation of the development project.***

According to Ramírez (2017), coca-growing communities have presented comprehensive development proposals to the government even from the beginning of the programme's implementation through different social organizations. Many of these communities, Ramírez argues, have been able to do this thanks to their local knowledge and lessons learned from their participation in different failed substitution projects conceived and implemented by people outside their regions. And although the PNIS initially suggested that development projects were to be built by the communities themselves with the advice of programme agents, the implementation has been very different. Abello argues that in the Caquetá region the communities have proposed to the government the planting of Amazonian fruits or the promotion of tourist activities. This is significant considering that

the five productive projects managed by the government in the PNIS would never responsibly be developed in the region because it is mostly covered by the Amazon rainforest (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020). However, the government has not yet responded to them.

In the same way, in an interview conducted by Vargas (2019 et al), the interviewee noted that “although group discussions with the communities were important (in the PNIS), and projects were achieved as a result of participatory processes, these activities were very delayed and the coca was not being reduced”. These obstructions to community participation, as already mentioned, have been the result of a short-term approach focused on reducing coca at the cost of harnessing the knowledge of local communities.

***6.1.2. Learning rapidly and progressively: Improvisation, interaction, flexibility, and adaptability are welcome during the learning process. There is no blueprint programme.***

Due to lack of political will and resources to implement the programme in the way it was initially formulated, the PNIS has been reduced to promoting projects related to predetermined production areas. This limits the possibility for communities to propose their ideas, making the programme inflexible to the different contexts and needs of each community and region. On the contrary, the structure of the programme is more characterized by a top-down view of public policy. The government has recently been closing the spaces for dialogue and negotiation with actors participating in the programme or simply instrumentalized them (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020; R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020).

In addition to the above, the PNIS structure by stages can be inflexible with the communities. Some of the reasons for the latter have been delays in the provision of the grants promised to the participants, which in turn is the product of financial limitations and delays in bureaucratic processes between each of the phases of the programme (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020).

#### ***6.1.3. Seeking diversity: The idea is to seek variability in the information collected.***

Although no data was collected in this study regarding how the government's development agents were working during the formulation of projects with the communities, an analysis of the current situation of the programme shows the little interest the government has in understanding the different proposals, ideas and concerns of each community. Trying to pigeonhole projects within predetermined productive branches or offering specific options to coca growers is a limitation for the diversity of possible scenarios in all the territories where the programme is implemented.

#### ***6.1.4. They do it: Development agents work only as facilitators during the investigation, analysis, presentation, and learning processes. Local people generate and own their outcomes while also learning and enhancing their analytical capabilities.***

Throughout the programme, and mostly during the initial implementation phase, several communities have proposed productive projects on their own, along with the collaboration of development agents (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020; Vargas et al, 2019; UNODC, 2020). However, more recently, communities have gone from being excited about participating in the programme to being disappointed and uncertain about what will happen next. Ricardo says that “several families are just waiting for the programme to end, but nothing guarantees that coca will not grow again” (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020).

#### ***6.1.5. Sharing: Information is shared by community members, between them and facilitators, and between different development agents.***

Due to the top-down structure that currently characterizes the programme, many of the spaces where programme information was shared and discussed have been bypassed. Abello states that the programme is being managed in a unidirectional manner, and that the government has not met with the “PNIS Strategic Direction Board” (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020). Meanwhile, several community organizations that have been part of the implementation and socialization of the agreements with community participation have been discredited by associating them with the new FARC political party. It should be noted that the Ideas para la Paz Foundation (2019) has warned of the



capture of some participatory spaces of the communities by intermediary actors. In this sense, the communities have been relegated and, instead of managing the implementation, they feel uncertain about the future of the programme.

***6.1.6. Empowering local people: The idea is to empower local communities so that they can access the political, economic and social structures of which they were previously not part.***

Given all the difficulties, it could be said that the programme's capacity to empower communities has been very limited. Still, Ramírez (2017) suggests that, unintentionally, the programme has managed to empower coca growers who have reaffirmed their status as people with rights. The government, for its part, took the first step by recognizing them as victims of the dynamics of the conflict and drug trafficking, and not as criminals. However, it is important to mention that the law that criminalizes coca growers is still in force, even though its elimination had been initially agreed upon during the peace process.

***6.1.7 Sustainable local actions and institutions: The PRA seeks sustainable outcomes sustained by local communities over time.***

Considering its current structure, the ability of the PNIS to generate local institutions and projects that last overtime is not encouraging. Ricardo, for example, had suggested that several families are only looking to finish the programme, but are not sure if they will grow coca again or not (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020). Furthermore, the low and financial capacity of the PNIS does not seem to help with this either. Only a long-term approach to the problem of illicit crops will provide sustainable outcomes.

## **6.2 Types of Participation**

Based on the typology of participation by Pretty (1993), this research argues that participation within the PNIS has not allowed the true empowerment of participating families and communities. On the contrary, until now, the programme has been characterized by having a very limited participatory component. A closer examination of

the characteristics of the participation of coca growers in the programme leads to a conclusion that there have been different characteristics throughout the PNIS. The types of participation identified were: Passive participation, Participation by consultation, and Participation for material incentives. However, none of these levels of participation would offer the type of interactive involvement described in the peace accords and that expected by the coca growers themselves.

Pretty (1993) defines passive participation as that in which the participants of the development programme are only informed what has been decided while the information is handled exclusively by external agents. This type of participation describes the experiences of some families participating in the programme. In the Caquetá region, Aragón (2019) found that one of the communities studied complained that the government initiated the programme without consulting them and that the assemblies were not decisive. In other words, at the end of the day, it was not the communities who ended up defining the projects but the government itself. That same community stressed that "for the government socializing the PNIS was only to inform about the plan, regardless of whether the families agreed or not." In this same region, Abello comments that, during the initial stage of the programme, its organization had to work to guarantee the establishment of channels of dialogue between the communities and the government. This was because government agents were not complying with the basic principles of the PNIS, among these, the participation of the communities (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020). In this way, although the PNIS participatory spaces seem to address the need to provide communities with agency, they end up reinforcing the same hegemonic structure where decisions were made from above by those who control power (Vélez-Torres & Larrea -Mejía, 2020).

Participation by consultation has also been present during the implementation of the PNIS. In this type of participation, people get involved by being consulted, they have no power over the collection of information, and development professionals are not obliged to use input from the communities. This form of participation is evidenced in the way that some programme officials refer to the implementation of community assemblies: "Yes, the ideal is the agreement with the communities, but that takes us a long time ... and the

coca is still there ”(Vargas et al, 2019, p. 127). In another of their studied communities, Aragón (2019) highlights that the families complained about the lack of support from the state, as well as their lack of interest in several of the issues and ideas that they considered relevant. Abello also highlights the limitations that the new government is imposing when establishing the type of projects on which families can base their ideas (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020). The above examples show that participating families are not being empowered. On the contrary, the voices of these communities are not being heard, contradicting the participatory principle of the peace agreement and the PNIS.

The third type of participation that was identified based on the interviews and document analysis was “participation for material incentives” (Pretty, 1993). According to Ricardo, after so many delays and challenges, some families would be looking to finish the implementation of their productive projects without any real interest in continuing to implement them in the future (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020). Many of these communities are discouraged by the poor implementation of the programme by the government, which has not provided most families with resources to start their productive projects (R Pérez, Interview, May 5, 2020; UNDOC, 2020). Abello, in this same sense, suggests that up to now the government has only overseen providing cash transfers to families, thus repeating previous errors from previous AD programmes (R. Abello, Interview, May 14, 2020). This being the case, some families and communities would only be exchanging their work (eradication of coca plantations) for monetary incentives. With this level of participation there is no guarantee that PNIS participants will continue this work beyond the period of monetary exchange or use what they have learned in the future.

### **Final conclusions**

This study was designed to determine the effects of AD programmes on the livelihoods of coca-growing communities in Colombia and sought to determine how effective the Colombian government’s AD voluntary substitution programmes have been in improving the livelihoods of coca-growing communities. The analysis focused on the current PNIS

and was based on participatory approaches to development. This plan follows the implementation of other AD programmes in the country, such as Plante, Plan Colombia or Forest Ranger Families, none of which has been able to offer definitive results to local communities. The results of this study indicate that the positive impacts of the AD programmes and PNIS on the communities over the last few decades have been limited. They have been characterized by having numerous limitations, such as the context of violence in the producing regions; the disconnect between the objectives of government plans and the local communities; limited commitments to long-term sustainability and, above all, the lack of political will to rethink the current contradictory anti-drug policy that favours forced eradication and short-term results.

According to the data obtained in this research, it is argued that the PNIS has in practice followed a route very similar to that of its predecessors despite its initial purpose of addressing all the limitations that previous AD experiences have had in the past. The government has insisted on achieving the short-term objective of reducing coca crops in the shortest possible time, to the detriment of a long-term objective that seeks to transform the regions and guarantee the well-being of the communities affected by the crops.

The role of community participation in the effectiveness of AD programmes is crucial to guarantee sustainable solutions that are sensitive to local needs and contexts in the long term. This is due to the fact that participation has both intrinsic and instrumental values. In the case of PNIS, the investigation showed that the involvement of local communities has had several obstacles. Based on Pretty's typology of participation, and Chambers' participatory principles, it was determined that the involvement of these communities has been marked by the limits of a top-down approach to public policy. Due to this unidirectional vision in decision making, the knowledge, social assets, ideas and proposals of local communities have been relegated to the background. The participation of families and communities in the PNIS has varied during the different stages of the programme, as well as between the different regions. However, in none of the types of participation observed, was there a real willingness on the part of the government to empower the participants. Instead, the types of participation found were passive participation, participation by consultation and participation for material incentives. One

implication of this is that there is no certainty that the communities, once the programme is completed, will continue to develop their productive projects.

A rethinking of the national anti-drug policy is urgent. This policy should put the well-being of the communities affected by the dynamics of illicit drug trafficking before the immediate reduction of coca plantations. Likewise, it is necessary to design new indicators to measure the effectiveness of these programmes. These indicators should be able to measure the well-being and livelihoods of the affected communities, and not just the hectares of coca eradicated. Many of the coca-growing communities have developed significant social capital and accumulated knowledge that could be very useful when building ideas between communities and development agents. It is essential for the government to support and aid these communities so that they can build their own paths to development.

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2021

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